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Trade unions and  
landlordism

[London]

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# TRADE UNIONS AND LANDLORDISM.

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How Private Ownership in land keeps down Wages.  
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## AN APPEAL FOR CO-OPERATION.

IT is one of the most significant tributes to the solid basis of practical common sense that underlies the work of the organised trade unions of the United Kingdom that, for several years past, the annual Trades Congress has, with practical unanimity, affirmed the principle of the national ownership of land. Amid many detailed and technical proposals for the improvement of the condition of the workers in various industries, this protest against the private ownership of land now has a permanent place. And it is fitting that it should be so, for this question of the land overshadows all other reforms. It is the root from which industrial grievances spring. It is the basis upon which every social injustice stands; and while it remains we may palliate injustice here and there a little, but can never effect that general advancement of the working classes which the Trades Congress is banded together to secure. The private ownership of land is able to neutralise the effect of much work that would otherwise be productive of great good; and at every point and turn, it stands in the way of the workman who desires to make his class independent and happy. Therefore the standing resolution of Congress on the subject is notable as a proof of the insight possessed by the labour leaders into the real foundation upon which class privilege and its accompanying evils find a firm footing.

The practical instincts of British working men will not allow this resolution to be a mere pious expression of opinion. What is

wanted is some channel through which the force of this opinion can be sent so as to produce actual and tangible results; some method of working that will enable the principle not only to be affirmed in words, but realised in facts. Working, as the trade unions are, for the improvement of the conditions of labour, and recognising, as they do, that fair access to the land is essential to the prosperity and due reward of industry, we would suggest the advisability of hearty co-operation with those who have undertaken the special work of organising public opinion upon the land question.

There can be but little need to argue as to the necessity of such a step.

#### THE LAND QUESTION STANDS UPON A DIFFERENT BASIS TO ANY OTHER LABOUR QUESTION.

Until it is settled, the trade unions, with all their splendid energy, can make very little permanent impression upon the main bulk of social injustice. A glaring excess of injustice here and there may be lopped off, but the great mass of class privilege and inequality will remain. We suggest that trade organisations throughout the United Kingdom should affiliate with the Land Values Taxation Committee for the purpose of this special work.

The method of reform advocated by the Committee is easy of application, and easily understood. We deny the right of any man to a monopoly of the earth. His present possession of that monopoly was begotten by injustice, continued in injustice, and results in injustice. That the community should pay the present holders of land, compensation for resuming its rightful ownership is a contention with which we have no sympathy. Instead of buying out the landlords we must tax them out. This principle has been accepted by the Liberal party which, in the Newcastle programme, has adopted the taxation of land values as one of its main intended reforms.

The Royal Commission on the housing question has also given expression to weighty and impressive opinions in the same direction. Working men do not need to be told that it is the refusal of direct access to the land which keeps the wages of

agricultural labourers at 11s. or 12s. a week, thereby constituting the competition of these labourers a standing menace to the standard of working-class hiring in every industry. The taxation of land values would cure that. It would give an enormous impetus to industry by relieving it of the burdens it now has to bear, by throwing open lands held for speculative or unprofitable purposes, and would give effectiveness to all the other reforms that are at present nullified. The result of such a policy must be evident to every intelligent workman. By throwing land into the market, and opening it up to industry,

#### THE TAXATION OF LAND VALUES WOULD ASSIST IN SOLVING THE UNEMPLOYED QUESTION

to a degree beyond the narrow calculations of those pettifogging statesmen who tinker at reforms without going to the root of the evil. Land at present held for speculative or unprofitable purposes would be thrown open. Agricultural rents would fall. Labour would be thus attracted in large quantities to the land. Wages would go up with a bound; for who would work as a labourer for another man at the existing miserable wages when he could earn his own living on the land? The effect of all this upon the artisans of the towns would be enormous. The great housing improvements so urgently needed, but at present hindered by the landowning class, would be put in hand at once; and a general stimulus given to every branch of industry. The adjustment of this question is the first duty of every civilised Government. As the law now stands, the classes possess—and do not fail to avail themselves of—the means of robbing labour; and the fair development of human life is consequently rendered impossible.

No longer should the people submit to unjust claims, and hand over to landlords the money which they are entitled to keep to save their families from starvation. We therefore propose

#### STRIKES AGAINST UNJUST RENTS, INSTEAD OF STRIKES AGAINST LOW WAGES.

By this means we shall attack the root of the disease, and the people will keep money in their own pockets instead of keeping it out. Of course we do not propose immediate and indiscriminate

strikes. None could be undertaken until the people in each locality had become enlightened and enthusiastic on the subject, but we should work up to this.

*Trade unionism must therefore go hand in hand with land reform if it is to be thoroughly successful.* Of course no Government has a right to pauperise anyone; and the friends of landlordism have ingeniously used the fact that a few working-men, out of their hard-earned savings, have got little freeholds, and under cover of asking what is to become of these if private ownership of land is done away with, have attempted to stir up working class sympathy with the Dukes and Squires. The attempt is, of course, utterly ridiculous; but at the same time it is as well to point out that while compensation as compensation cannot for a moment be accepted, it is quite within the power of Parliament to make such provision as would prevent the taxation of land values from reducing such men to pauperism. But that is quite a different matter from

**GIVING HUGE SUMS IN COMPENSATION TO LANDOWNERS,** who have made ample provision for themselves at the public expense. In order to push forward the accomplishment of this reform we invite the earnest consideration of all associations seeking the improvement of labour, with a view to their affiliation with the Committee. Each has its own special and detailed work to do, and could hardly give up from that special work the time and energy with which it is necessary to pursue this matter in which all are so largely concerned. But by affiliation with the Committee they can give the sanction of their authority and support to the practical working out of a principle which they have already repeatedly sanctioned in theory; and can show that they do not believe in leaving resolutions to lie idle after they have passed them, but are intent upon following them up until they are no longer mere proposals but accomplished facts.

*This leaflet is included in "Tracks for the Times, No. 3," in which is contained, "The Powers and Scope of the Scotch Parish Councils' Act," with "Hints and Advice to Electors." Also in "Tracks," No. 4, in which is contained, "The Parish Councillor at Work, What to do, and How to do it; or Hints and Advice to English Parish Councillors"; also the Annual Report of the Land Values Taxation Committee. "Tracks," Nos. 3 & 4 may be had post free, price 2d. each. Special quotations for quantities.*

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